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A Contribution to the History of the Term “Massorah.”—In the first chapter of his *Commentarius Massorae Historicus* (Tiberias, Part I.), Buxtorf says that the pronunciation now generally in use among the Jews of the name of the Tradition that dealt with the biblical text is **מִסּוֹרָה** (after the form of בְּנֹרֶךְ Jer. iii. 7), and as *samech* has a sharp sound, the word is written with a double *s*, Massorah. This manner of spelling the word, although it was not adopted by Buxtorf himself, is still everywhere in vogue; at the same time, however, one generally recalls the possibility referred to by Buxtorf that the form of the word may be **מִסּוֹרָה** (with a dagesh in the **ס**). Buxtorf also mentions that the word was by many read **מִסּרָה** or **מִסּרָה** and even **מִסּרָה** (by Paginus), while he himself adduces the form **מִסּוֹרָה** (compare **פִשׁוֹרָה** **עֲבֹדָה**) as possible. This remarkable fluctuation in the pronunciation of a word of such frequent use, as well as in the grammatical explanation of its form, still prevails. Compare F. Buhl, *Kanon und Text des alten Testaments* (Leipzig, 1891), page 95 seq. The very foundation upon which the use of the word itself rests is extremely uncertain. In the oldest sources (Talmud and Midrash) it is not to be found at all, as in these only its equivalent **מִסּוֹרָת** is to be met with. Similarly, later authorities speak only of **מִסּוֹרָת**, which expression is very often employed to indicate the Massorah in its written form, as, for example, by Abulwalid (see quotations in my *Life and Works of Abulwalid, Merwan Ibn G'arrah*, etc., p. 52). Elias Levita speaks constantly of the **מִסּוֹרָת** not of the **מִסּוֹרָה**, both in the title and in the body of his great work dealing with the subject; the Massorites are with him, as with Ibn Ezra, **אֱנֹשֵׁי הַמִּסּוֹרָת**. I am not in possession of the requisite data to be able to explain how, in spite of all this, the expression **מִסּוֹרָת**; for which alone there is foundation in ancient usage and literature, has been displaced by the other terms. Elias Levita himself makes use of the other expression, **מִסּוֹרָה**, (mostly written *defective*, **מִסּרָה**), in order to indicate both the Massorah as “written down by the sages of the city of Tiberias,” as well as the written Massorah which is to be found in Bible MSS. (see beginning of the Third Introduction ed. Ginsburg, p. 103, וּמְהֻם לְחַכְמֵי טָבְרִיא אֲשֶׁר כָּתְבָוּ וּקְרָאוּ לְהַמִּסּוֹרָה קְטַנָּה הַמִּסּוֹרָה הַגְדוֹלָה and the same Introduction, p. 138, **כָּל הַמִּסּוֹרָת הַנְּדִפסָת** *seq.*)¹. He thus appears to recognise the name as applicable

¹ Instead of Ginsburg's **כָּל הַמִּסּוֹרָה הַנְּדִפסָת** p. 138, the edition 1538, p. 28, line 4, has **כָּל הַמִּסּוֹרָת הַנְּדִפסָת**.

only to the concrete form of the written Massorah, not to the Massorah in general.¹ Jacob ben Chayim, the first editor of the Massorah (in Bomberg's Bible, 1518), speaks in the Preface as well as in the prefatory remarks to the Massorah finalis, mostly of **מסורה** (always without ה), but also of **מסורת**, while he calls the written Massorah consistently **מסורה defective**. His example will certainly have been of the greatest influence in the further use and general adoption of the word **מסורת**. As regards its pronunciation, the word **מסורת**, resting, as it did, upon better testimony, was decisive, both words being considered as similar substantive forms, distinguished only by the feminine endings **תַּ** and **תָּ**; and, as Buxtorf asserts, the word was pronounced **מסורה**. The question, however, arises whether this was the original pronunciation of the form of the word written with ה. This may be doubted, since both Jacob ben Chayim and Elias Levita, unquestionably relying upon MS. sources, always write the word without a ה; while **מסורת** is always written with a ה. This doubt is strengthened by several very significant facts in the cognate literature. I have already pointed out (*Life and Works of Abulwalid*) that one of the two Oxford MSS. of *Kilāb-al-Luma* (No. 1,462) very often instead of **מסורת** (or **מסורת**) writes **מוסרת**, which spelling is also found in an exegete of the fourteenth century. Since then I have discovered that this variant spelling of such a well-attested word as **מסורת** can be explained by the influence of the form **מוסרת**. This form of the word is used almost exclusively to indicate the Massorah in the so-called "Massorah from Teman," which Ginsburg has edited in the third volume of his great work on the Massorah (p. 53 seq.). Here **מסורת** is only now and then to be met with (in Gen. xliv. 6; Exod. xxix. 15), elsewhere, **מוסרת**, also **מוסרת קתנה** and **מוסרת נזלה**. This pronunciation is attested from very ancient times. The Karaite exegete, Japheth ben Ali (end of the tenth century) says in his commentary on Daniel ix. 29 (ed. Margoliouth, p. 101, line 3), "וִצְבָתָה בְמֹסְרוֹת נֶדֶלוֹת" "it is fixed in the M."; and the same plural form of the word is also to be found in the renowned St. Petersburg *Biblecodex* of the year 1010, where in the superscription of a Massoretic section, the expression occurs **ולא נאמר במלירות נדלוות** **ולא במלירות רתנות**, the vocalisation being as here given, where, however, strange to say, the word is written once with cholem and once with kometz (see Baer and Strack, *Dikduke Ha-Teamim*, p. xxvi.).

¹ In Tishbi sub voc. **מסורת** at all, but only says in reference to Aboth iii. 13, **והיא המסורת הכתובה סכיב ספרי** **המקרא**.

A further proof of the age of the form of spelling מָסְרָה is furnished by the circumstance that the Karaite lexicographer *David ben Abraham*¹ calls the Massorah in Arabic אלמָסְרָה, מָסְרָה (see my treatise: *The Grammatical Terminology of Jehudah ben David ibn Chajjag*, p. 36); he thus forms the participle of the first conjugation of the verb מסר after the Arabic manner, corresponding to the Hebrew construction מָסְרָה as Kal participle. The Massora Magna he also calls in Arabic אלמָסְרָה אלכּבִירָה (see Pinsker, *Sikkute Kadmonijoth*, p. 140 of the text). It is therefore proved that the word מסר has been pronounced מָסְרָה since the tenth century, and one may assume that this is not an arbitrary pronunciation, but that it was the original pronunciation of the form מסר, which grew up in addition to the older form מסורת. The above-mentioned lexicographer, David ben Abraham, also uses the Hebrew form אלל מסר without ה (see Neubauer: *Notice sur la Lexicographie Hebraïque*, p. 100, l. 13), as in the St. Petersburg *Biblecodex*.

It follows from the preceding that the form מסר is not a later invention of the Massorah-scribes, but is to be regarded as an ancient term of the Massorites. I believe that the employment of this ending was determined by the fact that one of the encampments of Israel in the wilderness was called מָסְרָה (Deut. x. 6), and מָסְרוֹת (Numb. xxxiii. 30 and 31). Nothing was more natural than that this name should be used as a synonym for מסורה, whose plural מסורות also occurs.² It is, however, remarkable, that מסר is written defective, while מסורה in Deut. x. 6 is plene; but perhaps this is owing to being defective in Numb. xxxiii.³

¹ Formerly regarded as belonging to the tenth century. A later date has, however, been assigned to him. (See P. F. Frankl, Article "Karäer," in *Ersch und Grubers Allgemeine Encyclopädie*, 2 Section, xxxiii. 17.)

² Ibn Ezra in one place calls Ben Asher and Ben Naphtali שני שרי המסורות (see my *Ibn Ezra als Grammatiker*, p. 38, note 13), and his contemporary, the Karaite, Jehudah Hadassi, likewise speaks, referring to Ben Asher, of the מסורות (see Baer und Strack, *Dikduke Ha-Teamim*, p. xiii., note 14; comp. *Ibid.*, p. xxvii., line 6 from the end; *Ibid.*, page 79, line 8). In *Midrash Tanchuma*, ואותחנן, fin., R. Jonathan (third century) says . . . ניטלו מסורות החכמה ממשה . . . , for which passage the Midrash Petirath Mosheh (Jellinek's *Beth-Hamidrash*, vol. i., p. 127) has מוסרות אוצרות החכמה, perhaps a mistake in transcription from the Hebrew. See also *Bab. Megillah*, 3a; *Nedarim*, 37b; אלו המוסרות החכמה. See also *Bab. Megillah*, 74d, fin. has זה המוסרות החכמה.

³ It should also be observed that מָסְרוֹת, מָסְרָה, in the sense of *rineulum*, band (comp. Psalm ii. 3; civii 14; cxvi. 16), was a very general

The pronunciation of **מסורת** is likewise not free from doubt. True, Buxtorf (Tiberias, *loc. cit.*), referring to the spelling **מִסּוֹרָה**, says, “*Quae pronunciatio itidem communis est,*” and at the present day also this mode of spelling is almost universally adopted as the correct one. Levy (*Neuhebr. Wörterbuch*, iii, 178) adopts this punctuation, so also Strack in the *Dictum of Akiba, Aboth*, iii. 13 (*die Sprüche der Vater*, 2, Auflage, p. 38). But in reality the spelling **מִסּוֹרַת**, which has been emphasized by Buxtorf, and which is based upon the expression **בְּמִסּוֹרַת הַבְּرִית** (*Ezek. xx. 37*), appears to be more accurate. For although the word in Ezekiel is not exactly derived from **מִסּר**, but from **אָסֵר**, to bind to fetter (= **מִאָסֵר**), as Abulwalid already perceived (*Kilāb-al-Luma*, p. 244, line 17; *Rikma*, p. 146), and as, following him, David Kimchi explains, yet the traditional rendering of the word seems to have assigned to it the meaning “Tradition, Handing down,” in agreement with which Rashi explains **בְּבִרְית שְׁמֶסֶר לְכָם**. As a fact, the Targum retains the Hebrew word, together with the corresponding Aramaic term (**קִימָא**), and Theodotion translates, *ἐν τῇ παραδόσει τῆς διαθήκης* (see Field, *Hexapla II.*, 820a). Aquila, it is true, translates *ἐν δεσμοῖς τῆς διαθήκης*, and, following him, Hieronymus in *Vinculis Fœderis*. Still, for the dominant conception of the word in the time of the Tanaim and Amoraim, the Targum, when it is unopposed by any other explanation in the literature of tradition, is sufficiently convincing, especially as its translation is supported by Theodotion, and as Rashi gives evidence for the maintenance of the traditional view.

It is now more than probable that if the Tanaim employed the expression **מסורת**, not only for the text of the Scripture but also for the traditions relating to it, they did not introduce a newly-formed word into the terminology of the schools, but adopted the word from the Book of Ezekiel as a welcome substantive to the verb **מִסּר**, which latter occurs only twice in the Bible (Numb. xxxi. 5 and 16), but has passed from Aramaic into New-Hebrew, and which became, in *constructio pregnans*, an expression in common use in the schools (see Mishnah, *Aboth*, i. 1). For it is difficult to see why, for the purpose of expressing the idea of “Tradition,” a word of such rare occurrence, even in biblical Hebrew, as **מִסּוֹרַת** (after the model of **פִּצְרָת**, **בִּפְרָת**), should have been formed from the verb **מִסּר**¹ instead of

expression in the language of the Mishnah (see *Lery*, iii., 53b), and was even brought into connection with **מִסּר** by the Babylonian Amorah Raba (see *Baba Meziah*, 8b.)

¹ In New-Hebrew there is no substantive of this form so far as I know, and Siegfried, in his *Lehrbuch der Neuhebräischen Sprache* (1884) is only

מִסּוֹרָה or מִסְרָה (comp. עֲבָרָה), מִסְרָה (comp. עַיִּקָּה), and מִסְרָה (comp. דְּרַשָּׁה), would have been more conformable to analogy. The linguistic process probably took the following course: on the one hand מסר, having become a familiar verb, led to Ezekiel's word מִטְפָּרָת being used in the sense of Tradition.¹ On the other hand, the word was admitted into the terminology of the schools in order to form a substantive corresponding to the verb מסר. Had the word in Ezekiel not reached us with the Massoretic punctuation, it could certainly have been read quite as well as מִסְרָה, after the analogy of מִפְלָת (from אֶכְלָת), 1 Kings v. 25, as indeed Abulwalid also remarks (*loc. cit.*) that in מסרת the נ of the root has become softened, quiescent, but has not assimilated with the ס. As, however, we must assume that the word in Ezekiel was already read in the manner in which we find it punctuated in the earliest periods of the transmission of the text, it follows that the New-Hebrew expression based upon the word in Ezekiel must also be so pronounced, viz., מִסּוֹרָת. He who speaks and writes מִטְפָּרָת is therefore guilty of no inaccuracy, as the word in Ezekiel might also sound thus, but he has against him the facts as above presented in their historical development. Under no circumstances may מִטְפָּרָת be regarded as a direct noun-form derived from מסר, and independent of the biblical word.

I wish further to draw attention to the interesting fact that Elias Levita, in the explanation of the word מסרות, at the beginning of the third introduction to his *Masoreth Hamasoreth*, points only to the verb מסר, but makes no mention whatever of the passage in Ezekiel,² no doubt because he explained the biblical word according to its right meaning of fetter, band, and he therefore saw in it no connection with the end-form מסורת.

The following may serve as a brief summary of the results of the above investigations into the history of the name of the Massorah:—

1. From Ezek. xx. 37 the noun מִסּוֹרָת, as if it was derived from

able to adduce as examples of the ground-form *gattôl* the “Fem. מסורה, מִטְפָּרָת” (p. 44.) The form had long lost its propagative power, and even among the Payetanim, who had the courage to revive many a rare form, it is not represented by a single example. See the register of noun-forms in Zunz, *Die Synag. Poesie des Mittelalters*, pp. 383-409.

¹ Comp. opinion of Raba referred to above, p. 787 note 3.

² What Levy (*Wörterbuch*, iii. 179 b) cites in the name of Levita appears to rest upon some confusion with another author.

the verb **מִסְרָה**, was adopted as the expression to designate oral tradition,¹ but especially the tradition fixing the pronunciation of the biblical text. (Compare specially the expression **אֵם לִמְקָרָא אֶם לִמְסּוֹרָה**.) The term is also used in the plural.

2. In post-Talmudic times another substantive, also a biblical word, was applied with a similar meaning to the verb **מִסְרָה**, viz., **מִסְרָה**, pl. **מִסְרֹתָה**. It was regarded as participle *hal*, and accordingly was cast in Arabic form. Under the influence of this word arose also the form **מִסּוֹרָה** instead of **מִסּוֹרָתָה**.

3. The form **מִסּוֹרָתָה** remained until modern times, and even with Elias Levita, as the usual term to designate the Massorah. The form **מִסְרָה** or **מִסּוֹרָה**, its pronunciation **מִסּוֹרָה** being copied from **מִסּוֹרָתָה**, gradually became the customary designation of the Massoretic discussions (first edited by Jacob ben Chayim), and displaced the expression *Mâsôreth*.

4. The pronunciation **מִסּוֹרָתָה** has no historical justification.

5. For **מִסְרָה** the pronunciation **מִסּוֹרָה** alone is attested from ancient times; the forms of spelling **מִסּוֹרָה** and **מִסּוֹרָתָה** rest only upon the analogy of the two styles of spelling **מִסּוֹרָתָה**.

6. The transliteration Massorah or Masorah owes its right to further existence only through its having been long naturalised in scientific literature.²

W. BACHER.

¹ It is to be observed that halachic tradition is never indicated by this expression. See the examples in Levy, iii. 178 seq.

² So also one may continue to write "Agadah" as the transcription based upon long and general usage for **הַגָּדָה=אֲנָגָדָה** (Haggadah, Aggadah) just as foreign proper names are retained in the transliteration in which they have become usual, although they be not scientifically correct. Zunz, in his great work on the history of the Aggadah (*Die Gottesdienstlichen Vorträge*) writes Hagada (with one *g*), and similarly in his later works which is even less correct than Agada, as one may suppose a root **אָגָּדָה** for **אֲנָגָדָה**, and may punctuate the word **אֲנָגָדָה**.